8:Howell E, G-5 (1942-1944)1954
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

and under them a large number of headmen each representing a smaller community, often a single local lineage. The Nuer court is a judicial, executive, and administrative body, and there is, at present, only the beginning of a separation of the judiciary from the executive.[1] It is with the judicial aspect of its functions we are here concerned.

Administrative Policy and the Evolution of Nuer Courts

Administration of the Nuer up to about 1928 was of an attenuated form, and in the least accessible areas there was no administration at all. Action was confined to the attempt to maintain public order, to prevent raids on the Dinka, and to collect taxes in the form of cattle, efforts which were evaded by the Nuer more often than not, and occasional meetings for the settlement of disputes. Writing of the Zeraf Island area in 1924, the then District Commissioner rather gloomily remarks that he rarely saw more than the distant backs of Nuer and then only fleetingly. This was not perhaps surprising, for the Nuer bitterly resented the collection of tribute, which in those days meant parting with their cattle in return for nothing, or so it must have seemed to them. I mention this because, in assessing the effects of contact with European culture and, through the opening of communications and the maintenance of security, with the peoples of other tribes and of the northern Sudan, it must be remembered that external influences are relatively recent.

The military operations against the Nuer which started in 1928 represent a dividing line in recent Nuer history and in the history of the Administration. Thereafter the Nuer, by then at least partially subdued and with a wholesome respect for the power of the Government, were approached in a more conciliatory manner. It was a period of appeasement, and that the objectives of the Government should be understood by the Nuer at all is largely owing to the efforts of the District Commissioners already mentioned; and to them is due great credit. Their contact with the people was essentially personal, and their approach to the problem the right one, besides being the only effective means of gaining their confidence.

We are here only concerned with the problems of Nuer law and the evolution of legal procedures. At this period nearly all legal disputes were brought to the District Commissioner personally, who gave judgement with the assistance of the chiefs and saw to it that these judgements were executed. In the early stages the extent of litigation was limited, but what statistics are available show the increasing momentum as the years proceed. At the same time the authority and effectiveness of the tribunals established by the Government

[1] Local Government among the Nuer is in its infancy, and only provisional Rural District Councils exist at the time of writing.

14: Huffman M-5 (no date) 1931
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

Chapter Six

DISEASE, DEATH AND BURIAL

DISEASES AND THEIR REMEDIES

PROBABLY the greatest cause of physical distress is 164
the tropical disease which is commonly called yaws. It is prevalent throughout a large section of Nuerland, although it has not as yet invaded the Lau country.

This disease is characterized at the onset by aching in the muscles and joints, then lesions may form over various parts of the body. The mucous membrane of the mouth and nose becomes inflamed. Large ulcers may form on the limbs; when they do, the aching in muscles and joints usually stops. The bridge of the nose may be destroyed by inflammation.

Yaws is spread by contact with the discharges of the body of the person affected or discharges from the ulcers. It is not of syphilitic origin.

Sometimes the ulcers are quite large and deep; four to eight inches of tissue may be involved. Others, of course, are smaller.

The Nuer tries various treatments which have been 757
recommended to him by his elders. Certain leaves may be tied around the neck, a massage with hot water may be given to relieve the aching muscles and joints. The ulcer may be scraped with a shell, the edge of the shell having been previously sharpened. If a kernel forms in the groin due to an ulcer on the leg, a special grass is tied around the ankle to relieve it. The disease may wear itself out in time without medical care.

The Government doctors have trained some natives to 757
give the intravenous injections of the drug which is used 759
to eradicate this disease. These native men usually 651
accompany the District Commissioners on their rounds

[p 47]

14: Huffman M-5 (no date) 1931
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

757 to collect taxes, and thus come across many cases of yaws.
759 Probably few patients receive more than one injection,
651 for the Government officials do not stay long in one place, but that at least does its bit towards the healing process and also towards the prevention of the spread of this disease. And no doubt this medical work brought right to the Nuer's door, helps to alleviate the pain caused by the loss of their cattle as they are taken for the payment of taxes.

743 During the rainy season when the Sobat river is
757 navigable, and in all seasons on the Nile, the hospital boat—the *Lady Baker*—with at least one English physician and his helpers on board, provides treatment for all cases that can be reached in the towns along the rivers. Intravenous injections are given, and dressings are done. The dreadful ulcers receive one day's treatment at least. All who come to the hospital boat are treated for their various complaints. Those who wish may accompany the doctor to the hospital at Malakal, where they will receive free medical, surgical, and hospital care; they are given free transportation there and back to their villages again.

At Nasser there is a mission clinic. Here patients are encouraged to stay until they have received four of the intravenous injections and also a large daily dose of potassium iodide. Their sores are also dressed three times a week. Many, of course, leave before this course of treatment is completed, but others stay until a complete cure is effected. Skin grafts have been done at different times, three cases have been really successful.

Other remedies, such as bismuth, have been tried at this clinic, but beyond a palliative effect have been useless; the result has been time wasted for the Nuer and no definite cure. The intravenous injections were finally found satisfactory.

14: Huffman M-5 (no date) 1931
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

dry season, and as this was unusual it had occasioned 669
much comment among the Nuer. When they heard of 177
his death a number of them at once assigned that fact 791
as the cause of these rains.

In December 1927 there was a total eclipse of the moon 821
which caused much alarm among the Nuer. They felt sure that it meant destruction to them and to their country, for was it not dripping blood? Later on, when the patrol was put on in part of Nuerland, they felt that it was just the fulfilment of what they had foreseen when the moon was in eclipse.

There is a saying among the Nuer that when they have 721
plenty to eat they want to fight. That year, too, had seen a good harvest, and fight they did. There seemed to be many personal scores and old feuds that must be attended to that year, and then they declared it was all because the moon had predicted a year of trouble for them.

Not many Nuer have any conception of a country 641
besides their own and the land occupied by a neighbouring tribe. They recognize their chief and his authority, but do not seem to realize their need of a larger, higher governing power.

Their acquaintance with this higher authority is limited. They see their cattle taken for taxes, they usually are willing to bring their difficulties to the District Commissioner to be settled; they are willing to be relieved of their physical ailments to some extent, and usually welcome the Government doctor and his trained assistants whom he sends out during the dry season.

The Nuer does not—or says he does not—see any good 641
in paying taxes. Some of them feel that giving their 651
cattle up for taxes is submitting without protest to a raid from a representative of another country, and they feel that if the Government can collect taxes (or raid their

14: Huffman M-5 (no date) 1931
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

641 cattle as they call it), they certainly ought not to object
651 when the Nuer raid the Dinka and take their cattle.

641 The Nuers learn to trust the District Commissioner and to respect his decisions, even though they be averse to their cause. They quite often prefer having him to settle a case rather than their Nuer chief. And yet one of the most respected and best loved of District Commissioners was killed by a Nuer recently.

164 In the spring of 1929 an epidemic of what was at first
744 thought to be smallpox was reported in several villages. There were no fatalities, which is very unusual in Nuerland, for smallpox is very virulent and takes a heavy toll of life. The Nuer is accordingly much afraid of this disease. A clinic asked the doctor at Malakal to send vaccine, which he did, and many were vaccinated. The fact that the Government had sent vaccine for them and wanted to help them made a great impression upon the Nuer. Thus they realized that the Government did have something they needed and wanted to give it to them.

000 In time they may learn that they not only need what others can give them, but that they need to make their contribution to the world and to life outside of their own tribe.

411 There are not many guns among the Nuer. They depend upon the spear as their weapon, and it is usually not far from its owner's side. From boyhood on they are adepts at using the spear.

177 In the winter of 1928–9 the District Commissioner who was stationed at Nasser as his head-quarters had three aeroplanes come to Nasser. They stayed three days, their pilots being his guests. He wanted his Nuer to see aeroplanes at close range. He invited the people to take rides in them—the object being to show them that, while the aeroplane could be used for war purposes, it might also be used in times of peace. His interpreter was persuaded